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Message Text

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INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 OMB-01 COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 /093 W
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R 130731Z JAN 76
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1296
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
USMISSION GENEVA
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TUNIS 0178

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, ELAB, TS
SUBJECT: UGTT HOLDS NATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING TO DEMONSTRATE
SUPPORT FOR HABIB ACHOUR AND EXPELS HIS ENEMIES

REF: TUNIS 7423

1. SUMMARY: GENERAL UNION OF TUNISIAN WORKERS (UGTT) HELD
MEETING OF ITS NATIONAL COUNCIL JANUARY 3 AND 4 WITH
OSTENSIBLE PURPOSE OF DISCUSSING CURRENT POLITICAL
AND ECONOMIC SITUATION. PRINCIPAL RESULT OF MEETING WAS
DEMONSTRATION OF HABIB ACHOUR'S CONTINUED FULL CONTROL OF
UGTT AND HIS APPARENT INTENTION TO REMAIN ON OFFENSIVE
IN CAMPAIGN TO CONSOLIDATE HIS POLITICAL POWER AND KEEP
UGTT'S VOICE FULLY AUDIBLE IN GOT ECONOMIC POLICY MAKING
CIRCLES. NATIONAL COUNCIL EXPELLED SEVEN PERSONS FROM
UGTT DURING MEETING, INCLUDING FORMER MINISTER OF SOCIAL
AFFAIRS FARHAT DACHRAOUI, WHO WAS APPARENTLY SERVING
POLITICAL INTERSTS OF ACHOUR'S OPPONENT MOHAMED SAYAH.
EXPELLEES DID NOT INCLUDE MUSTAPHA MAKHLOUF, WHOM ACHOUR
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IDENTIFIED TO US IN NOVEMBER AS THE PRINCIPAL CULPRIT IN

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SAYAH'S ANTI-ACHOUR MANEUVERS. THIS FACT AND SAYAH'S
CONTINUED TENURE AS DESTOURIAN SOCIALIST PARTY (PSD)
DIRECTOR INDICATE THAT ACHOUR HAS NOT ENTIRELY SWEPT ASIDE
HIS ADVERSARIES BUT HE DOES APPEAR TO BE SOLIDLY IN COMMAND
OF THE UGTT AND READY TO TAKE ON ALL COMERS. MOST INTERESTING
ASPECT OF NATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING WAS RARE PUBLIC AIRING
IN PRESS OF AN INTERNAL POLITICAL DISPUTE AND THE ALMOST
UNPRECEDENTED FAILURE OF THE UGTT TO INCLUDE IN ITS PUBLIC
DECLARATITN AT THE END OF THE MEETING A PARAGRAPH OF
HYPERBOLIC PRAISE FOR PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA. END SUMMARY.

2. ON JANUARY 3 AND 4, THE UGTT'S TWO-HUNDRED MEMBER
NATIONAL CONCIL HELD A MEETING IN TUNIS TO REVIEW CURRENT
POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SITUATION. THE COUNCIL ALSO
REVIEWED INTERNATIONAL LABOR AFFAIRS, PARTICULARLY
ACHOUR'S ACTIONS ON BEHALF OF THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE
DURING THE ICFTU MEETING IN MEXICO LAST YEAR AND IN HIS
VISIT TO AFL/CIO. COUNCIL PASSED THREE RESOLUTIONS WHICH
EXPRESSED HIGH PRAISE FOR ACHOUR, ATTACKED TREASONOUS
ELEMENTS AMONG EX-UGTT LEADERS WHO HAD AUTHORIED "ODIOUS"
ATTEMPTS AGAINST ACHOUR, DECLARED "UNSWERVING"ATTACHMENT
TO NATIONAL UNITY, CALLED FOR CLARIFICATION OF THE SITUA-
TION OF PSD " PROFESSIONAL CELLS," AND MADE STATEMENTS IN
FAVOR OF MORE VIGOROUS GOT ACTION IN SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC
FIELD. THE COUNCIL ALSO EXPELLED FROM THE UGTT SEVEN
MEMBERS, AMONG THEM EX-MINISTER OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS
FARHAT DACHRAOUI, WHO APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN WITH MOHAMED SAYAH
IN HIS OCTOBER POWER-PLAY AGAINST ACHOUR. IN ADDITION TO
THESE RESOLUTIONS, THE COUNCIL SENT MESSAGES TO PRESIDENT
BOURGUIBA AND TO PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA. THE MESSAGE
TO BOURGUIBA EXPRESSED UGTT'S ATTACHMENT TO NATIONAL
UNITY, NOTED WITH SATISFACTION BOURGUIBA'S "SOLICITUDE"
FOR WORKERS, CONGRATULATED NOUIRA FOR HIS EFFECTIVE
POLICIES, AND PRAISED BOURGUIBA'S EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF
PALESTINIANS. MESSAGE TO NOUIRA PRAISED HIM FOR POLICIES
AIMED TO ACHIEVE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROSPERITY. INALMOST
UNHEARD OF DEPARTURE FROMNORMAL PRACTICE IN TUNISIA,
UGTT RESOLUTIONS AND MESSAGE TO BOURGUIBA DID NOT INCLUDE
A MENTION OF THE PRESIDENT'S "CLAIRVOYANCE," HIS GREAT
SACRIFICES FOR THE NATION, OR ANY OTHER OF THE APPROVED
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FORMULAE OF THE CULT OF THE PERSONALITY.

3. INFIELD OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRSCOUNCIL MADE
SPECIAL MENTION OF NEED TO KEEP SALARIES GROWING APACE
WITH INCREASES IN THE COST OF LIVING. OTHERWISE, THE UGTT
CALLED FOR MORE GOT ACTION IN FIELDS OF HOUSING CONSTRUCTION,
RURAL DEVELOPMENT, EXTENSION OF COLLECTIVE BARGAINING
AGREEMENTS TO RURAL LABORERS, REVISION OF THE LABOR CODE

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AND TAX REFORM. WORTH NOTE AS WELL, THE UGTT INCLUDED A FEW SWIPES AT AHMED BAN SALAH BY CHARACTERIZING THE PERIOD FROM 1965 TO 1970 AS THE "DISAPPEARANCE OF CONFIDENCE AND THE INSTALLATIONOF A CLIMATE OF DESPERATION AND ANARCHY THAT CARRIED THE COUNTRY TO THE EDGE OF THE PRECIPICE." (1965-1970 WAS, NOT COINCIDENTALLY, PRECISELY THE PERIOD WHEN ACHOUR WAS IN DISGRACE AND NOT SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE UGT.)

4.WHILE INTERNATIONAL LABOR AFFAIRS WERE ARED DURING COUNCILMEETING, IT APPEARS THAT MAIN PURPOSE OF THIS WAS TO DEMONSTRATE ACHOUR'S INTERNATIONAL STATURE AND HIS PRO-PALESTINIAN CREDENTIALS. SPECIAL NOTE WAS TAKEN OF ACHOUR'S DISCUSSIONS WITH AFL-CIO PRESIDENT MEANY, IDENTIFIED AS AN UNQUESTIONING SUPPORTER OF ISRAEL, WHO NOW, ACCORDING TO ACHOUR, FAVORS A "PEACEFUL SOLUTION." THE COUNCIL WAS READ A LETTER FROM ILO DIRECTOR GENERAL BLANCHARD, WHICH EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR ACHOUR'S DISCUSSIONS WITH MEANY.

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ACTION NEA-10

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INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TUNIS 0178

5. IN DISCUSSION OF RWSULTS OF COUNCIL MEETING AND OTHER

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RECENT DEVELOPMENTS WITH EMBASSY OFFICER, ACHOUR EVIDENCED
GREAT SELF-CONFIDENCE ABOUT HIS CURRENT POLITICAL POSITION.
HE FELT THAT HE HAD COMPLETELY THWARTED SAYAH'S POWER
PLAY AND EVEN BOASTED OF A STRIKE WHICH HAD PARALYZED PUBLIC
TRANSPORT IN HE SAHEL REGION FOR TWO DAYS LAST WEEK.
IN THE PAST ACHOUR HAS BEEN MILDLY SENSITIVE ABOUT STRIKES;
NOW HE APPEARS PROUD OF THE WORKER POWER THEY DEMONSTRATE.
ACHOUR ASSERTED THAT SAYAH HAD TRICKED PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA
INTO APPROVING THE OCTOBER POWER-PLAY AND THAT IT HAS BEEN
PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA WHO AIDED ACHOUR INKEEPING CONTROL
OF THE UGTT. WHEN ASKED IF HE THOUGH T SAYAH MIGHT SOON
LEAVE HIS POSITION AS PARTY DIRECTOR, ACHOUR DECLINED TO
MAKE ANY PREDICTIONS BUT INTIMATED THAT THIS MAY BE IN
THE WORKS.

6. COMMENT:

(A) THE UGTT NATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING HAS AMPLY
DEMONSTRATED THAT ACHOUR REMAINS IN FULL CONTROL OF THE
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TUNISIAN TRADE UNION MOVEMENT AND IS READY TO CONFRONT ANY
OPPOSITION WITH THE FULL WEIGHT OF THE WORKERS BEHIND HIM.
THE MEETING ALSO FOCUSED ATTENTION ON THE UGTT'S CURRENT
OBJECTIVES IN SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC POLICY AND INDICATED
THAT ACHOUR PLANS TO CONTINUE AGGRESSIVE PURSUIT OF THESE
GOALS IN GOT POLICYMAKING CIRCLES.

(B) REGARDING THE POLITICAL RESULTS OF THE MEETING,
IT IS BEST SEEN AS A VICTORY FOR PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA AS
WELL AS ACHOUR.THE FULSOME PRAISE LAVISHED ON NOUIRA
AND THE ATTACK ON BEN SALAH MUST HAVE BEEN WELCOME TO THE
PRIME MINISTER. THE EXTENT OF THE DAMAGE DONE TO
MOHAMED SAYAH REMAINS IN DOUBT, HOWEVER. HE WAS THWARTED,
BUT HE REMAINS AS PARTY DIRECTOR DESPITE ACHOUR'S REPORTED
DEMAND THAT HE BE REMOVED AND THE SPEARHEAD OF HIS ATTACK
ON ACHOUR, MUSTAPHA MAKHLOUF, REMAINS IN THE UGTT. ACHOUR'S
RELUCTANCE TO PREDICT SAYAJ#S DEPARTURE INDICATES THAT HE
IS NOT SURE IT WILL TAKE PLACE.THE COUNCIL'S CALL FOR
"CLARIFICATION" OF THE ROLE OF THE PSD "PROFESSIONAL CELLS,"
A TOOL DEVISED BY DAYAH TO UNDERMINE UGTT CONTROL OF THE
WORKERS, INDICATES NEVERTHELESS THAT ACHOUR DOES NOT INTEND
TO EASE UP ON HIS RETALIATORY CAMPAIGN AGAINST SAYAH.
IN ANY EVENT, THE RARE AIRING OF THIS INTERNAL
POLITICAL DISPUTE IN THE PRESS TESTIFIES TO ITS IMPORTANCE.
END COMMENT.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: LABOR RELATIONS, POLITICAL LEADERS, LABOR UNION OFFICIALS, MEETING PROCEEDINGS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 13 JAN 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ShawDG
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976TUNIS00178
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760011-1057
From: TUNIS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760160/aaaacbse.tel
Line Count: 220
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 TUNIS 7423
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ShawDG
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 25 MAR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <25 MAR 2004 by izenbei0>; APPROVED <03 AUG 2004 by ShawDG>
Review Markings:

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Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: UGTT HOLDS NATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING TO DEMONSTRATE SUPPORT FOR HABIB ACHOUR AND EXPELS HIS ENEMIES
TAGS: PINT, ELAB, TS, (ACHOUR, HABIB)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

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